

KINDERGARTEN REVISIONS

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House Bill 4662 (Substitute H-5)

Sponsor: Rep. Virgil Smith

Committee: Education

First Analysis (3-19-08)

BRIEF SUMMARY: House Bill 4662 would amend the Revised School Code to require school districts and certain charter schools to provide kindergarten; to require parents to send five-year-olds to school (phasing in a September 1 cut-off by 2011-12, and allowing a parental waiver); and to require full-day kindergarten beginning with the 2011-2012 school year for schools that fail to make adequate yearly progress under the federal No Child Left Behind law for two consecutive years. The bill would take effect January 1, 2009.

FISCAL IMPACT: The bill could increase both local and state education costs. Every local school district currently provides kindergarten, so the provision requiring that they do so would have no fiscal impact; however, lowering the age of mandatory school attendance from six to five could increase costs depending on how many five-year-olds already attend school. Estimates suggest that the change could cost as much as \$72 million. Full-day kindergarten would impose significant costs on local districts. For more detail, see *FISCAL INFORMATION*.

THE APPARENT PROBLEM:

Like many aspects of the U.S. education system, the idea of kindergarten (or a child's garden) originated in Germany in the 19th century. The first kindergarten, begun by Friedrich Froebel, was designed for children between the ages of three and seven to develop their mental, social, and emotional faculties through play, music, movement, interaction with the outdoors, and opportunities to engage in independent and creative pursuits. Replicating that nurturing and protective model, Wisconsin-based Margarethe Shurz opened the first kindergarten in the U.S. in 1857. This private, German-speaking, full-day program was followed by the first English-speaking public kindergarten in St. Louis in 1873.

Between 1890 and 1910, public interest in school-based kindergarten grew substantially. And the goals and purposes of kindergarten changed quickly to accommodate the aims of public schools. Generally, early school-based kindergartens inculcated shared cultural values and norms through self-directed play. Early childhood educators of that era viewed formal academic instruction as detrimental to the development of young children. This view continued until the 1970's, when guided instruction (sometimes in full-day programs) was added to the pre-kindergarten and kindergarten experiences of poor children, in an effort to ready them for academic coursework in schools, and better ensure their intellectual success.

Today, half-day kindergarten is a near universal experience in the lives of young children in the United States. The adults who guide children's emotional, social, and academic development—both parents and educators—seek a balance between academic content area instruction, *and* exploration and interaction through self-directed play. Many work hard to ensure the kindergarten experience is developmentally appropriate. However, researchers note that since the U.S. standards and assessment movement of the 1990's, the kindergarten experience has shifted from a play-based curriculum to a curriculum focusing on the formal teaching of discrete skills. Increasingly, kindergarten classrooms have begun to resemble first grade classrooms in their emphasis on formal reading and math instruction rather than play and socialization.

In Michigan, for example, the State Board of Education has adopted Grade Level Curriculum Content Expectations for kindergarten in the areas of science, mathematics, and English language arts. The standards for each learning discipline align with related standards for grades K through 8. See *BACKGROUND INFORMATION*. According to committee testimony, fitting those curricular goals into a half-day program is not possible, the time constraints being too narrow.

In August 2002 when the Michigan State Board of Education issued its "Early Literacy Task Force Report" to demonstrate the importance of childhood literacy to school success, the report cited studies that show over one-third of American children enter kindergarten unprepared to benefit from classroom instruction.

In order to devote more time to academic instruction and appropriate social interaction skills early in a child's academic career, and to ensure a more equitable school experience for children reared in poverty, legislation has been introduced to require kindergarten for all Michigan five-year-olds (but allow a parental waiver); and beginning with the 2011-12 school year, to require that kindergarten be a full-day experience in elementary schools where children failed to make adequate yearly progress under the federal No Child Left Behind law, for two consecutive years.

THE CONTENT OF THE BILL:

House Bill 4662 (H-5) would amend the Revised School Code to:

- Require school districts and charter schools to provide kindergarten if they provide a grade 1.

[Districts are not currently required to provide kindergarten, although all do.]

- Require parents to send children to public school if they become five years old on or before November 1 for the 2009-10 school year; on or before October 1 for the 2010-2011 school year; and on or before September 1 for the 2011-12 school year. Children who reach the age of five after the specified dates each year would have to be enrolled in school by the following year.

[Currently, parents must send children to school for the school year in which they become six years old before December 1. A child who becomes six after December 1 must be enrolled by the following year.]

- Allow parents to sign a waiver form to exempt from public school attendance a child who is younger than age six on December 1 of the school year.

[This would be in addition to current public school attendance exemptions, such as attendance at private school or home schooling.]

- Grant students the right to attend school if they are (1) at least five years of age on December 1 and less than 20 years of age on September 1 of the school year; or (2) for special education students, are less than 26 years of age on September 1 of the school year.

[Currently, children who are five years old on the first day of enrollment of the school year have the right to attend school.]

- Require full-day kindergarten, as of the 2011-2012 school-year, in schools that fail to meet adequate yearly progress for the most recent two consecutive years under the federal No Child Left Behind law.

The bill would take effect January 1, 2009.

MCL 380.1147 and 380.1561

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

Education Commission of the States Policy Issue Site called "Kindergarten: What States Are Doing," and including selected research & readings about full-day vs. half-day kindergarten is found at www.ecs.org/htm/Issue.asp?issueID=77

The National Institute for Early Education Research at Rutgers Graduate School of Education has issued a working paper entitled "Is More Better? The Effects of Full-Day vs. Half-Day Preschool on Early School Achievement" located at www.nieer.org/mediacenter/index.php?PressID=53

The Michigan State Board of Education issued, in August 2002, its "Early Literacy Task Force Report" to demonstrate the importance of childhood literacy to school success, citing studies that show over one-third of American children enter kindergarten unprepared to benefit from classroom instruction. Then on March 8, 2005, the State Board published "Early Childhood Standards of Quality for Pre-kindergarten" to set guidelines for the nurturing of three- and four-year olds. The State Board has also issued "Grade Level Content Expectations: Kindergarten" for mathematics, science, and English language arts. These documents and more are available at www.mi.gov/mde In 2004, the governor launched Project Great Start, a movement that challenges us to recognize that education begins at birth, not when a child enters school. See www.greatstartforkids.org

In February 2005, the Michigan Early Childhood Investment Corporation (ECIC) was founded, in order to leverage public and private dollars to expand the availability of high-quality early education and child care, including parenting education. See www.ecic4kids.org

FISCAL INFORMATION:

The following information is based on the H-2 version of the bill. This portion of the analysis will be updated soon to reflect the H-5 version reported by the House Education Committee.

Summary

The bill could increase both local and State education costs. Every local school district currently provides kindergarten, so the provision requiring that they do so would have no fiscal impact; however, lowering the age of mandatory school attendance from six to five could increase costs depending on how many five-year-olds already attend school. Estimates suggest that the change could cost as much as \$72 million. A detailed explanation of how these estimates were derived follows below.

In addition the bill would require that by 2011-2012, districts provide full-day kindergarten. The state currently pays districts a full foundation allowance for each kindergarten pupil whether they are in a half- or full-day program, so state costs would not increase. However, this could create significant cost increases for local districts due to increased staffing and facility needs. See below for estimates of the number of districts currently providing full-day kindergarten as well as estimates of pupils attending full-day programs.

Mandatory Age of Attendance

There were 129,518 children born in Michigan in 2002 who would be five years old for the current school year. Estimated population data from the U.S. Census Bureau suggests that Michigan has a negative net migration, which is likely to have resulted in the loss of approximately 1,250 five-year-olds between 2002 and now. Subtracting this from the children born in 2002 would leave us with a total of approximately 128,250 five-year-olds currently in Michigan.

According to the Center for Educational Performance and Information (CEPI), there were 108,763 children enrolled in FY 2007-08 who turned five between December 2, 2006 and December 1, 2007. This represents about 85 percent of the 128,250 five-year-olds currently in Michigan. This also means that five-year-olds represent nearly 88 percent of the 123,845 students reported in kindergarten in Fall 2007.

According to information voluntarily reported to the Michigan Department of Education (MDE) by private schools, nearly 10,400 children were in private kindergartens in FY 2006-07. Discounting this based on the drop in birthrates from 2001 to 2002 and the estimated impact of migration from 2002 to 2007, we estimate that approximately 10,000 children were enrolled in private kindergartens in FY 2007-08. As stated above, 88 percent of those enrolled in public school kindergarten are five years old. If the same proportion of students who attend private kindergarten are five years old, then there

would be about 8,800 five-year-olds currently in private kindergartens. This would represent about 7 percent of the 128,250 five-year-olds currently in Michigan.

Adding the 85 percent of five-year-olds in public schools to the 7 percent in private schools provides an estimated total of 92 percent of five-year-olds currently attending school. If the mandatory age of enrollment is lowered for FY 2009-10, the additional 8 percent of five-year-olds who would have to attend school would equal approximately 10,275. If the same proportions attend public and private schools as those already enrolled, approximately 9,500 would attend public school. At an average FY 2007-08 foundation allowance of \$7,573, this would require an additional \$72 million. Any increases in the foundation allowance between now and FY 2009-10 would increase the expense.

There is insufficient data with which to estimate how many five-year-olds are home-schooled; however, any additional costs would be reduced to the extent that a portion of the 8 percent unaccounted for in either public or private schools attend home schools.

Full-Day Kindergarten

According to information collected by the MDE on the number of days and hours of instruction provided in kindergarten programs, it appears that of the 662 districts for which there was data, approximately a third of all districts providing kindergarten provide half-day programs, while another third provide full-day programs, and a final third provide either both or some alternative of the two. For the purposes of this discussion, full-day kindergarten means an equal number of hours of instruction as in grades 1-12.

However, looking at the number of students in each type of program provides significantly different results. Only 16 percent of students were in programs where the district only provides full-day kindergarten; 38 percent of students were in programs where the district only offers a half-day program; and the remaining 46 percent were in districts that either provided both or alternative types of programs. For districts that provide both half- and full-day programs, there is no available data to show how many students are in which type of program. Alternative programs may include, for example, either half of the total instructional hours provided in three longer days or five days with somewhere between 50 percent and 100 percent of the total instructional hours provided to other grades.

This suggests that a significant portion of children attending kindergarten are not in full-day programs and that local districts could face significant cost increases if required to provide full-day programs.

ARGUMENTS:

For:

Those who favor kindergarten attendance *for all five year olds* say that children that age are developmentally ready for school. They note that early elementary school teachers, including kindergarten teachers, must instruct children following the state curricular guidelines called grade-level content expectations for grades K-3. Those guidelines—in

math, science, and English language arts—are designed to be developmentally appropriate for five-year-old students. Kindergarten experts point-out that it is more effective to address learning disabilities, and accommodate special needs when problems are diagnosed early in a child's school career. Then, the full resources of the educational system can be fully utilized to remedy the problem.

For:

Proponents of this legislation say a full-day, developmentally appropriate kindergarten increases academic achievement that can be sustained throughout a child's schooling with properly aligned curricula. They also note that full-day kindergarten enhances social and emotional development, allowing students to develop the interpersonal skills needed to work productively with others. Finally, they point out that full-day programs provide more flexibility for teachers in time management, allowing them to increase instructional time, prepare more challenging learning opportunities while lesson planning, and provide individual and small group encouragement—all at a more relaxed pace.

Although there are scores of studies about every aspect of kindergarten spanning 40 years (most conducted in local settings), the newest nationwide database managed by the U. S. Department of Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement, National Center for Education Statistics is called The Early Childhood Longitudinal Study-Kindergarten Cohort. It measures a nationally representative cohort of U.S. children from kindergarten through fifth grade. In 2002, Valerie Lee and David Burkam at the University of Michigan (and colleagues) were awarded a grant in which they used the first two waves of data drawn from a nationally representative sample of over 8,000 1998-99 kindergartners in over 500 U.S. schools to track students' academic outcomes. The research team updated their findings in 2005.

Their study indicates that more than half of all kindergartners (55.7 percent) experience full-day programs, and that in every region of the country those programs are most commonly available to less advantaged children in public schools (likely due to the use of federal compensatory education funds). For example, seventy percent of children from families living in poverty enroll in full-day kindergarten, in contrast to 52 percent of those whose families are at or above the poverty line. Further, access to full-day kindergarten is comparably low in the Northeast and the West where 25-29 percent of kindergartens are full-day, more common in the Midwest where 46 percent are full-day, and very common in the South where 84 percent are full-day. Finally, full-day kindergarten is much more common in schools located in large cities or small town/rural areas in the South and Midwest, and in schools with higher proportions of minority students.

Using multilevel statistical research methods (hierarchical linear modeling or HLM, a first in kindergarten research), Lee and Burkam show that children who attend schools that offer full-day programs learn more in literacy and mathematics over the kindergarten year than do their half-day counterparts. Indeed, their study likely understates the programs' effectiveness; they note that the actual learning may be up to 50 percent more than estimated, since the pre- and post-tests are administered as little as six months (not a full instructional year) apart. Further, the full-day programs appear to collapse achievement gaps between high and low income students. For example, nationwide, Black children,

kindergarten repeaters and children from less affluent families are more likely to attend full-day kindergarten. Attendees enter full-day kindergarten with somewhat lower achievement scores in literacy and mathematics, but by the end of the year they are on equal status with half-day kindergartners in literacy and only slightly behind in mathematics. Lee and Burkam note that teachers of full-day kindergarten classes report spending about one-third more time on instruction than those who teach half-day classes. Teachers use the additional time with their students to broaden their social as well as their academic experiences.

Response:

Some opponents acknowledge achievement gains in full-day kindergarten programs, but question the cost-effectiveness of full-day kindergarten. They point-out that the up-tick in academic achievement experienced by low income students is relatively short-term—customarily sustained only through the early years of elementary school.

Reply:

Proponents note that properly aligned curriculum in grades 1 through 5 can work to sustain early academic gains, such as those seen in full-day kindergartens. They argue that beginning first grade with a standard set of word- and number-recognition competencies gives every early elementary school student an even and more equitable start.

Against:

Some of those opposed to kindergarten for *all five-year olds*, argue that such a requirement diminishes parental authority, as well as parents' responsibility to care for their youngsters when they are of tender years. They point-out that not *every* five-year old is school-ready, and they argue that since parents know what is in the best interest of their children, only parents should decide when kindergarten entry is best begun. They view the incursion by the state as a requirement that violates the sanctity of the family, eroding the status of parents while strengthening the power of government officials who neither know nor carefully attend to the development of their children.

Response:

The bill was amended in the House Education Committee to allow parents to waive this requirement by signing a form and filing it with the local school district.

Against:

Opponents of the bill argue that offering a full-day kindergarten will increase costs significantly. Although the state currently pays districts a full foundation allowance for all kindergarten students whether they are in a half- or full-day program, costs will nonetheless increase substantially when some districts are required to implement a full-day kindergarten, in 2011. That is because most school districts currently offer a half-day program, and most teachers instruct two cohorts of children each day. They do so in a single classroom. Consequently, as each of those cohorts is offered a full-day kindergarten experience, two teachers will be necessary, each working in a separate classroom. For many districts, then, both the number of teachers and the number of classrooms will double. Costs will soar. For example, the superintendent of the Rockford School District estimates a full-day kindergarten would cost \$2,483,927, to pay 17 new teachers, buy 17 portable classrooms, and arrange for more art, music, physical education, speech therapy; as well as to pay for the services of psychologists, social

works, classroom aides, food services staff, two additional custodians, and two more bus drivers.

Response:

Proponents argue House Bill 4662 is *pre-funded*, and not an unfunded policy mandate. Since the state currently pays districts a full foundation allowance for each kindergarten student attending a half-day program, school district officials are obligated to offer a full-day of education. If school district officials are currently using their full per pupil foundation allowance to subsidize other areas of the school operation, they will need to re-prioritize their budgets, and direct the state aid for full-time kindergarten to the program for which it is intended.

POSITIONS:

The Michigan Department of Education supports the bill. (3-11-08)

The American Federation of Teachers supports the bill. (2-19-08)

The Detroit Public Schools support the bill. (3-11-08)

The East Detroit Federation of Teachers supports the bill. (2-19-08)

The Michigan Association of School Boards supports the bill. (3-18-08)

The Michigan Elementary and Middle School Principals' Association supports the bill. (3-18-08)

The Detroit Parent Network supports the bill. (3-18-08)

The Michigan Association of Non-Public Schools opposes the bill. (2-19-08)

The Michigan Catholic Conference opposes the bill. (2-19-08)

Newaygo County Home Educators oppose the bill. (3-11-08)

Michigan's Charter Schools oppose the bill as amended. (3-18-08)

The Michigan Small and Rural Schools are neutral on the bill. (3-11-08)

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■ This analysis was prepared by nonpartisan House staff for use by House members in their deliberations, and does not constitute an official statement of legislative intent.